

# INDIAN FORD

Address: Jordan River near Camp Williams  
Present owners: Thanksgiving Point (east bank)  
Paul/Laura Hardman (west bank)

One of the most intriguing facts about the Lehi area is its strategic position in terms of historic transcontinental transportation and communication. The Pony Express Trail, the Overland Trail, and the Transcontinental Telegraph route crossed the Point-of-the-Mountain before bisecting the Jordan River at Indian Ford. In the previous eons, the fording site, also called Rocky Ford or “the rapids,” was the Jordan River fording site for native Americans.

In 1858, with the arrival of the Utah Expeditionary force at Camp Floyd in Cedar Valley, a short cut to Salt Lake City was needed. The military built a road that crossed the divide between fairfield and Lehi, and then made a beeline for Indian ford. The roadway subsequently went northward until it intersected State Road on the east side of Oak Hollow (where the auto salvage yard is presently located). From 1858 until 1869 this bisection was called the Camp Floyd Cutoff.

The Pony Express Trail crossed Indian Ford during its 1860-61 operation. This enterprise was only in business for eighteen months, yet it captured the imagination of the American public because of the brashness of the idea. The concept of young men, “orphans preferred,” facing daily danger as they dashed across the continent on the fastest horses available, is part of the grand and romantic tradition of the American West.

The transcontinental Telegraph crossed there in 1861. From 1861 to 1866 the Overland Mail Company, a subsidiary of Wells-Fargo, operated a ferry at Indian Ford. Wells-Fargo maintained the operation from 1866 until 1869, after which the mail was transported by rail.

The ferry operations were under the supervision of agent Porter Rockwell, who maintained his residence at Rockwell Station (near present Utah State Prison), from 1861 until 1866. While no photographs or descriptions of the ferry

are extant, it was evidently a pontoon-like system which was either pulled or poled across the river.

On June 9 1863, during high winds the ferry sank, forcing Overland Mail driver Frederick Scarlett to direct the coach three miles farther south to the Lehi-Jordan Bridge. Here Caroline Ball, wife of the tollkeeper, warned Scarlett that Indians had told her they were going to attack a stagecoach.

The nervous Scarlett drove on across the fills to Fairfield, but saw nothing unusual and apparently did not report the warning to the station keeper. At 7:00 a.m. the following morning driver Wood Reynolds and express man, Thomas O'Shonnison, rolled eastward across the flats towards Lehi. As the mail coach rounded the shoulder of the hill near the present Byron C. Dastrup residence (11149 West 8570 North), approximately twenty-five Indians (who had been concealed in Big Wash) ambushed the men.

Twelve-year-old Lehi herdsman, George Kirkham, atop a knoll (just west of the present-day River Jordan Mink and Silver Fox Farm), witnessed the speeding coach trying to outdistance the raiders to the ferry at Indian Ford. Though the mail coach's horses were superior to the Indian ponies, three of the animals were shot--forcing the coach to stop in the high brush approximately one quarter-mile off the road. Reynolds, a young tough who had assaulted Utah Governor John W. Dawson the previous January, stood behind one of the horses and began to fire rapidly. Despite his gallant efforts, both he and O'Shonnison were quickly cut down, scalped and terribly mutilated.

Indian Ford, the scene of so much remarkable history, lies on Lehi's western border near camp Williams. The property owner on the eastern side of the ford is Thanksgiving point, where the new Ambush Golf Course just opened in 1997. The Paul/Laura Hardman family owns the west section. While the site remained relatively unchanged until 1985-86, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Jordan river dredging project removed the ford to improve the river's flow. The recent construction of the golf course has obliterated the trail and ferry landing site on the east side of the river. Plans are underway to erect a suitable monument on the east side of the ford to document its significance in Utah history.

